

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 01909 061554Z

14

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 MC-02

ACDA-05 EB-07 SAM-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /085 W

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R 061237Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3883

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

CINCPAC

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 1909

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MASS, PFOR, IN, US

SUBJECT: SWEDES SEE VIGGEN AGAIN ACTIVE COMPETITOR

REF: NEW DELHI 0845

1. THE SWEDES HERE ARE ONCE AGAIN OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THEIR CHANCES OF SELLING THE VIGGEN TO THE INDIAN AIR FORCE. THE SAAB SCANIA SALES MANAGER AND THE CHIEF TECHNICAL ADVISOR, THE FORMER ACTING COMMANDER OF THE SWEDISH AIR FORCE, RETURNED TO NEW DELHI TEN DAYS AGO FOR CONFERENCES WITH THE INDIANS. THE TECHNICAL ADVISOR IS STILL HERE AND WILL REMAIN AS LONG AS NECESSARY TO HANDLE QUESTIONS FROM THE NEW INDIAN DEFENSE MINISTER AND NEW IAF CHIEF OF THE STAFF, BOTH OF WHOM ACCORDING TO OUR SWEDISH COLLEAGUE, REQUIRE TIME TO BRIEF THEMSELVES ON THE COMPETING FIGHTERS.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 NEW DE 01909 061554Z

2. THE SWEDES HERE EXPECT THAT THE IAF WILL SEND A TEST PILOT TO SWEDEN TO FLY THE VIGGEN SINCE THE CURRENT MODELS COMING OFF THE LINE ARE AIRWORTHY. HE TELLS US THE INDIANS HAVE ACCEPTED THE EXPLANATION FOR THE WING STRUCTURAL DEFECT WHICH TEMPORARILY GROUNDED THE EARLY MODELS.

3. THE SWEDES BELIEVE THEIR MOST TELLING POINT, HOWEVER, IS THE LONGEVITY OF THE AIRCRAFT. THEY SAY THEY HAVE CONVINCED THE IAF THAT THE REPLACEABLE AVIONICS PACKAGES IN THE VIGGEN RENDER IT CAPABLE OF PERIODIC MODERNIZATION WITH THE RESULT THAT IT WILL BE VIABLE UNTIL 2000 (WHICH SOUNDS A BIT FAR FETCHED TO US). OUR SWEDISH COLLEAGUE SAID THE PROPOSAL CONTINUES TO BE THAT THE INDIANS BUILD THE AIRFRAMES AND POSSIBLY SOME ENGINES OR ENGINE COMPONENTS, BUT THE SWEDES PROVIDE THE AVIONICS. SINCE THE INDIANS WANT "THE BEST", ACCORDING TO OUR SWEDISH CONTACT, THE IAF REGARDS THE AVIONICS AS VITAL. MOREOVER, THE SWEDES WOULD NOT CONSIDER SELLING THE VIGGEN WITHOUT THE "BLACK BOXES." THESE FACTORS, THE SWEDES ASSERT, GO A LONG WAY TO OFFSET THE DISADVANTAGE OF RELATIVELY HIGH INITIAL UNIT COST. ANOTHER INDUCEMENT, AS SEEN BY THE SWEDES HERE, IS THAT SAAB SCANIA HAS COMPLETED ITS SURVEY OF INDIAN EXPORTS AND CONCLUDED IT COULD MARKET SEVERAL ITEMS IN SWEDEN OR THE WEST MAKING A BARTER TYPE ARRANGEMENT AT LEAST FEASIBLE FROM THE SWEDISH POINT OF VIEW.

4. THE SWEDISH FOREIGN MINISTER IS DUE ON A VISIT TO NEW DELHI CIRCA MARCH 1. THE SWEDES ARE BRACED FOR ANOTHER INDIAN APPEAL FOR CREDIT WHICH OUR COLLEAGUE SAYS SWEDEN WILL NOT GRANT, BUT HE DID SAY THE MINISTER WOULD STRONGLY SUPPORT THE VIGGEN SALE. OUR COLLEAGUE WOULD NOT SAY WHAT OTHER CONCESSIONS THE SWEDES MAY BE CONSIDERING.

5. THE SWEDES HERE HAVE ALSO MADE IT QUITE CLEAR THEY UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY INFLUENCES IN THE FINAL DECISION IN THE FIGHTER SWEEPSTAKES. OUR COLLEAGUE DESCRIBES RANJIV GANDHI IN FLATTERING TERMS, AND CONTENTS HIS TECHNICAL EXPERTISE IS OF A HIGH LEVEL. THIS MAY OR MAY NOT BE. OFFHAND WE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT A TRANSPORT PILOT NOT THE BEST EXPERT TO RELY UPON IN EVALUATING A FIGHTER PLANE, BUT THEN WE ARE SPEAKING OF A TRANSPORT PILOT WHO HAS ANOTHER AND PERHAPS MORE RELEVANT QUALIFICATION.

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 01909 061554Z

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, MILITARY SALES, NEGOTIATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NEWDE01909
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760047-0384
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760274/aaaacndw.tel
Line Count: 108
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 NEW DELHI 845
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 APR 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <10 AUG 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SWEDES SEE VIGGEN AGAIN ACTIVE COMPETITOR
TAGS: MASS, PFOR, IN, US, SW
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006